**Mughal Empire**

The Mughal Empire emerged in India during the late Middle Ages and lasted until the dawn of the modern era. The rise of the Mughal Empire and the concomitant spread of Islam were emblematic of the times; they paralleled the achievements of the Ottoman and Safavid empires and left enduring architectural, artistic, political, and religious legacies throughout India and surrounding regions.

The empire began in 1526, when the Mughal Babur, a descendant of the Mongol Genghis Khan, conquered Delhi. There, Babur established the capital of his empire. The dynasty spanned the next seven generations, and the Mughals governed India for over two centuries. They successfully instituted wide-ranging government reforms, worked to unite the disparate populations of the empire, and left an enduring legacy of wonderful art and architecture. During the reign of the Mughals, India was primarily Hindu, as it remains today. Despite the inherent potential for interreligious strife, the Muslim Mughals were able to maintain fairly peaceful relations between those two groups, Muslims and Hindus, and the Christian minority.

Babur was succeeded by his son Humayun in 1530. Humayun proved to be a far less beneficent ruler than his father and a far less effective one than his own son, who succeeded him in 1556. Humayan's 26-year reign was marred by his reported addiction to opium and the ever present threat to his reign by his brothers. Those circumstances were unfortunate for Humayun in light of the fact that the Mughal presence in the region had only taken hold a handful of years before his ascendancy. The two decades of his reign were not particularly successful, and when he died in 1556, the empire that was established by his father Babur was on a tenuous foundation, as it was deeply divided and poorly administered.

Better times were to come for the empire following the death of Humayun. At the young age of 13, his son Akbar succeeded him, and for nearly 50 years, he reigned and distinguished himself as the most effective of the many Mughal rulers. Under his leadership, the empire was united and greatly expanded, aided by the use of the relatively new invention of firearms. Among Akbar's most important characteristics was his dedication to the arts. Akbar actively promoted the arts by patronizing artists and craftsmen; in the process, he created a heritage of fine carpet making, painting, and glass blowing known collectively as Mughal arts. In addition to his efforts in that arena, Akbar instituted a number of reforms designed to make life more equitable for Muslims, Christians, and the majority Hindus alike. He was also responsible for expanding economic and political relations with the Mughals' European contemporaries.

When Akbar died, his son Jahangir assumed the role of emperor and reigned from 1605 to 1627. None of Akbar's successors was able to achieve the kind of religious toleration he had secured, however, and the 17th century brought tremendous religious strife within the empire. Persecution of Hindus and resultant rebellion marked the final decades of the Mughal Empire. By the mid-18th century, the empire was on the verge of collapse, as it was losing its territories and was becoming increasingly vulnerable to foreign intervention.

In 1803, the Mughal Empire met its demise. The British government took control of it but allowed the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, to remain on the throne. However, when he participated in a revolt against the British, he was exiled from India. The British, who among other transgressions, stripped jewels from numerous Mughal monuments, including the Taj Mahal, also destroyed many of the vestiges of the greatness of the Mughal Empire.

**Further Reading**

Foltz, Richard, *Mughal India and Central Asia,* 1998; Goalen, Paul, *India: From Mughal Empire to British Raj,* 1992; Srivastava, M. P., *The Mughal Administration,* 1995.

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